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ABSTRACT

A study was undertaken to determine if attitudes toward various regional dialects could be improved by teaching about the range of American English. The subjects were 47 sixth grade students. The experimental group of 21 subjects studied lessons on regional dialects for 55 minutes each day, while the control group of 26 subjects studied literature, spelling, and morphology for that period. At the end of the 15 day period both groups were tested. It was determined that (1) there were significant differences between the two groups in the subjects' responses in terms of both speaker's voice factor and the total characteristics of the dialect speaker; (2) there was no significant difference between the subjects' responses in terms of the kind of person factor; and (3) there were significant differences between the experimental subjects' responses to their own dialect and their responses to one of the other dialects. It is concluded that learning about the range of dialects in American English can help to reduce language prejudice, and that learning about regional differences can cause students to become more accepting of dialects other than their own, even to the point of considering another dialect more positively than their own. (JF)

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THE EFFECTS OF INSTRUCTION UPON CHILDREN'S ATTITUDES TOWARD REGIONAL DIALECTS

The problem of negative attitudes toward different dialects in English is essentially one that encompasses the whole population of America (Shuy, 1967). It is a particular problem for nonstandard dialect-speaking children in the elementary grades who must experience the negative attitudes of their teachers and of their peers. It has been suggested that the elementary schools work to eradicate language prejudice that has developed among people (O'Neil, 1968).

The object of this study was to determine if attitudes toward various regional dialects could be changed positively by teaching about the range of American English through the presentation of different dialects in stories and on tapes.

It was hypothesized (1) that at the sixth grade level there would be no significant difference in attitude between students who have been taught about regional differences in dialect and those who have not been taught about regional differences in dialect, and (2) that there would be

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no significant difference between the attitudes of the experimental-group after instruction when listening to speakers of their own dialect and when listening to speakers of other dialects.

Description of the Study

The subjects used in the study were 47 sixth grade students. The experimental-group consisted of 21 subjects, and the control-group consisted of 26 subjects.

The dependent variable under consideration was the response of subjects to the speakers of five differing dialects. Experimental subjects studied lessons on regional dialects of American Dialects for 55 minutes each day. These lessons contained selected chapters of stories in dialect, articles on dialectal differences with short exercises, and listening to regional dialects spoken on tapes. The control subjects studied a unit on literature, lessons on morphology, and units on spelling for 55 minutes each day. Each group met for 15 days. Data were collected before and after the treatment period. The subjects listened on tape to five speakers with different regional dialects. Reactions to the speakers were marked on a seven-step semantic differential scale with bipolar adjectives. The records, Americans Speaking by McDavid, Jr. and Muri and The Dialect of the Black American by Paul K. Winston, were

used for the speakers in the test. Two stimulus questions were selected to measure the subjects' attitudes towards (1) the way the speaker talked, and (2) the kind of person the speaker would be. They were as follows: "Which best describes the way the speaker talks?," and "Which best describes the kind of a person the speaker would be?"

An analysis of variance was performed on the experimental and control groups' responses to the five dialects. A t-test was performed on both the pretest and posttest responses of the experimental-group, comparing the experimental subjects' responses to their own dialect with their responses to each of the other dialects.

Results of the Study

An analysis of variance was performed on the scores for responses of the experimental-group versus the control-group to Total Characteristics of the speakers, the Speaker's Voice factor, and the Kind of Person factor with adjectives summed as follows: for the Total Characteristics of the Speakers scores, the subjects' responses to both the Speaker's Voice and to the Kind of Person were summed across all eight scales (Bad—Good, Pleasant—Unpleasant, Boring—Interesting, Nice—Awful, Lazy—Hardworking, Intelligent—Dumb, Dishonest—Honest, Educated—Uneducated); for the Speaker's Voice factor, responses were summed across three

scales (Bad—Good, Pleasant—Unpleasant, Boring—Interesting); and for the Kind of Person factor, the responses were summed across five scales (Nice—Awful, Lazy—Hardworking, Intelligent—Dumb, Dishonest—Honest, Educated—Uneducated). The pairs of adjectives were selected from Osgood's (1957) book and from Snider and Osgood (1969). The experimenter also added pairs of adjectives.

The results (Table 1) obtained for the pretest responses of the experimental-group versus the control-group was an F ratio of 1.94 for the Total Characteristics of the speakers and was not significant at the .05 level. The results for each of the factors of Speaker's Voice and Kind of Person showed that neither one was significant at the .05 level. Therefore, it was concluded that no significant differences in terms of the study's key variables existed between the control and experimental groups' responses before the treatment was administered.

TABLE 1

ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE OF EXPERIMENTAL-GROUP VERSUS CONTROL-GROUP SCORES OF ALL SPEAKERS ON TOTAL CHARACTERISTICS, ON SPEAKER'S VOICE AND ON KIND OF PERSON AT PRETEST

Sources of Variation	Sums of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Squares	F Ratios	p Levels
TC Between groups	962.55	1	962.55	1.94	.171
Within groups	22351.28	45	496.70		
Totals	23313.83	46			

TABLE 1—Continued

Sources of Variation	Sums of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Squares	F Ratios	p Levels
SV Between groups	24.629	1	24.629	.24	.6286
Within groups	4671.797	45	103.818		
Totals	4696.426	46			
KP Between groups	679.24	1	679.24	2.82	.100
Within groups	10856.46	45	241.25		
Totals	11535.70	46			

TC = Total Characteristics (summed across all eight scales)
SV = Speaker's Voice (summed across three scales)
KP = Kind of Person (summed across five scales)

Table 2 presents the posttest results of comparisons made to test hypothesis 1.

TABLE 2

ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE OF EXPERIMENTAL-GROUP VERSUS CONTROL-GROUP SCORES OF ALL SPEAKERS ON TOTAL CHARACTERISTICS, ON SPEAKER'S VOICE AND ON KIND OF PERSON AT POSTTEST

Sources of Variation	Sums of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Squares	F Ratios	p Levels
SV Between groups	1524.14	1	1524.14	11.64	.0014*
Within groups	5893.30	45	130.96		
Totals	7417.44	46			
KP Between groups	800.01	1	800.01	2.40	.128
Within groups	14976.84	45	332.82		
Totals	15776.85	46			
TC Between groups	4532.6	1	4532.63	6.20	.017 *
Within groups	32889.2	45	730.87		
Totals	37421.8	46			

TABLE 2—Continued

SV = Speaker's Voice (summed across three scales)
KP = Kind of Person (summed across five scales)
TC = Total Characteristics (summed across all eight scales)

*Significant at the .05 level

It can be noted that significant p-levels were found in terms of both (1) responses to Speaker's Voice, and (2) responses to Total Characteristics for the dialect speakers, but not in terms of responses to Kind of Person. The Speaker's Voice factor had an F ratio of 11.64 and was significant at the .05 level. The response to Total Characteristics of dialect speakers yielded an F ratio of 6.20 and was significant at the .05 level. However, the response to Kind of Person factor gave only an F ratio of 2.40 and was not significant. Thus, hypothesis 1 was rejected in only two of the comparisons: Speaker's Voice, and Total Characteristics of the dialect speakers, but not in terms of response to Kind of Person.

One can speculate as to why the Kind of Person factor was not changed positively, while the Speaker's Voice factor was changed positively. A possible explanation would be that the treatment lessons on dialect variation contained only exercises on vocabulary differences, pronunciation differences, and grammatical differences, all of which are probably more related to the Speaker's Voice factor than to

the Kind of Person factor, even though it was really hoped that the students' attitude responses would reflect a positive attitude change towards both the Speaker's Voice factor and Kind of Person factor. However, since there was apparently no transfer from these exercises on dialect variations to positive attitudes related to the Kind of Person factor, it must be concluded that direct instruction on Kind of Person factor and dialect variation is needed to change attitudes in terms of this factor.

In summary, the control group did not change in response to any of the dialects; however, the experimental group did change in response to two dialects: Inland Northern and Eastern New England. The changes in response by the experimental group took place in the Speaker's Voice factor in both the Inland Northern and Eastern New England and in the Total Characteristics for a dialect speaker for Eastern New England. No significant changes in responses took place for the Kind of Person factor in either of the two dialects: Inland Northern and Eastern New England.

The t-tests performed on the experimental group's responses to their own dialect and to each of the other four dialects compared the subjects' Inland Northern dialect to Southern Plantation, Eastern New England, Delaware Valley, and Black Northern in terms of Speaker's Voice factor, Kind

of Person factor, and Total Characteristics of the dialect speakers.

Table 3 gives the results of t-test comparisons of the experimental group's pretest responses to their own dialect and to each of the other four dialects.

A comparison between the experimental subjects' pretest responses to their own dialect, Inland Northern, and their responses to the Eastern New England dialect in terms of Kind of Person resulted in a difference significant to the .05 level. When the subjects' pretest responses to their own dialect were compared to their responses to the Delaware Valley dialect, a significant difference was again found in terms of Kind of Person. A comparison between the subjects' pretest responses to the Inland Northern dialect and their responses to the Black Northern dialect resulted in two significant differences, one in terms of responses to Kind of Person and another in terms of response to Total Characteristics of the dialect speakers. Thus, before the treatment the experimental subjects perceived the speakers of their own dialect, Inland Northern, more positively than they did some of the other dialects in terms of the Kind of Person factor.

Table 4 presents the results of the posttest comparisons performed to test hypothesis 2.

It can be seen from Table 4 that posttest compari-

TABLE 3

EXPERIMENTAL-GROUP PRETEST MEAN-SCORES* AND DIFFERENCES ON RESPONSES TO FIVE REGIONAL DIALECTS: INLAND NORTHERN OVER SOUTHERN PLANTATION, OVER EASTERN NEW ENGLAND, OVER DELAWARE VALLEY, AND OVER BLACK NORTHERN

	Levels of Response to Each Dialect														
	Inland Northern			Southern Plantation			Eastern New England			Delaware Valley			Black Northern		
	M	SD	SE	M	SD	SE	M	SD	SE	M	SD	SE	M	SD	SE
SV	11.52	5.095	1.112	13.43	5.202	1.135	12.86	5.082	1.109	13.14	5.332	1.164	13.48	4.501	.982
KP	27.81	5.862	1.279	25.52	6.038	1.318	23.67	5.407	1.180	24.05	6.328	1.381	16.19	5.278	1.152
TC	39.33	8.777	1.915	38.95	9.325	2.035	36.52	9.647	2.105	37.19	10.84	2.37	29.67	6.681	1.458

	Inland Northern Over Other Differences											
	Over Southern Plantation			Over Eastern New England			Over Delaware Valley			Over Black Northern		
	Diff.	t Score	P Level	Diff.	t Score	P Level	Diff.	t Score	P Level	Diff.	t Score	P Level
SV	-1.91	1.174	NSD	-1.34	0.803	NSD	-1.62	1.088	NSD	- 1.96	1.066	NSD
KP	2.29	1.146	NSD	4.14	2.532	<.05	3.75	3.097	<.01	11.62	5.605	<.01
TC	.38	0.124	NSD	2.81	0.946	NSD	2.14	1.020	NSD	9.66	3.250	<.01

SV = Speaker's Voice; KP = Kind of Person; TC = Total Characteristics; Diff. = Difference Between Means
Experimental-group N = 21
*Ranges possible: for SV, 3 to 27; for KP, 5 to 35; for TC, 8 to 56

TABLE 4

EXPERIMENTAL-GROUP POSTTEST MEAN-SCORES* AND DIFFERENCES ON RESPONSES TO FIVE REGIONAL DIALECTS: INLAND NORTHERN OVER SOUTHERN PLANTATION, OVER EASTERN NEW ENGLAND, OVER DELAWARE VALLEY, AND OVER BLACK NORTHERN

	Levels of Response to Each Dialect														
	Inland Northern			Southern Plantation			Eastern New England			Delaware Valley			Black Northern		
	M	SD	SE	M	SD	SE	M	SD	SE	M	SD	SE	M	SD	SE
SV	14.38	4.225	0.922	14.86	3.745	0.817	13.05	4.533	.989	15.14	4.973	1.085	13.33	4.841	1.056
KP	25.24	4.689	1.023	25.10	4.582	1.000	25.57	5.446	1.188	28.00	4.837	1.056	23.05	7.338	1.601
TC	39.62	8.334	1.819	39.95	7.419	1.619	38.62	9.097	1.985	43.14	8.731	1.905	36.38	11.209	2.446

	Inland Northern Over Other Differences											
	Over Southern Plantation			Over Eastern New England			Over Delaware Valley			Over Black Northern		
	Diff.	t Score	P Level	Diff.	t Score	P Level	Diff.	t Score	P Level	Diff.	t Score	P Level
SV	- .48	0.382	NSD	1.332	0.903	NSD	- .76	1.083	NSD	1.05	0.798	NSD
KP	.14	0.105	NSD	- .33	0.225	NSD	-2.76	3.325	<.01	2.19	1.291	NSD
TC	- .33	0.144	NSD	1.00	0.360	NSD	-3.52	3.032	<.01	3.24	1.212	NSD

SV = Speaker's Voice; KP = Kind of Person; TC = Total Characteristics; Diff. = Difference Between Means
Experimental-group N = 21
*Ranges possible: for SV, 3 to 27; for KP, 5 to 35; for TC, 8 to 56

sons between the subjects' responses to their own dialect, Inland Northern, and their responses to the Delaware Valley dialect produced a significant difference in terms of Kind of Person factor and also in terms of Total Characteristics of the dialect speaker. It should be noted that the Delaware Valley dialect is now viewed more positively than the subjects' own dialect, Inland Northern, in terms of Kind of Person factor.

In summary, at the pretest the subjects viewed their own dialect more positively in terms of Kind of Person factor than they did some of the other dialects, while at the posttest these differences were not present except that now the subjects viewed one other dialect more positively than their own dialect.

Conclusions

The essential findings of the study were (1) that there were significant differences between the experimental-group subjects' and the control-group subjects' responses in terms of Speaker's Voice factor (first question in the test) and in terms of Total Characteristics of the dialect speakers, (2) that there was no significant difference between the experimental-group subjects' and the control-group subjects' responses in terms of Kind of Person factor (second question in the test), and (3) that there were significant

differences between the experimental subjects' responses to their own dialect and their responses to one of the other dialects (a) in terms of Kind of Person factor and (b) in terms of Total Characteristics of the dialect speaker.

The following conclusions are made from the results of the study:

1) that the treatment, learning about the range of American English dialect, appears to be a method of language study that can help reduce language prejudice; and
2) that learning about regional differences in American English apparently caused the experimental subjects to become more accepting of dialects other than their own, even to the point of considering another dialect more positively than their own.

Recommendations for Future Research

The following suggestions are recommended for future research in the changing of attitudes towards different dialects:

1) The findings in this study indicate that this method of teaching about language differences appears to be an effective means to change

attitudes at the sixth grade level toward dialect differences. The feasibility of this method could be explored at the lower grades in school as a means of changing attitudes toward dialect differences.

2) A longitudinal study could be done to find out if attitudes continue over extended periods of time to be positive toward dialect differences after learning about the range of American English. Observations of attitudes at specified later periods of time could be made. This would yield information as to how much, if any, continued teaching about dialect differences is needed.

3) Positive attitude responses were not found for Kind of Person factor in the comparisons between the experimental-group and the control-group of subjects. Materials on dialect variations did not contain lessons related to the Kind of Person factor. Possibly materials could be constructed to deal with dialect variations and Kind of Person factor.

These research studies would give valuable information that could contribute to eradication of language prejudices.

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